

ALL OUT FOR 32!

Jackson Bird claimed a career-best 7-18 as Tasmania bundled out defending champions New South Wales for 32, their lowest total in first-class cricket, on day two of their Sheffield Shield match in Hobart on Sunday. It was a memorable outing for Bird who smashed a run-a-ball 54, his highest score, at number nine to help the hosts post 333 in their first innings at Bellerive Oval. It was with the ball, however, that the fast bowler harmed NSW the most. The 34-year-old claimed three wickets in his first eight deliveries even before NSW could put a run on the board. The touring side lasted only 19.3 overs with skipper Peter Nevill, who made 10, managing double figures.



REUTERS



Manchester United striker Marcus Rashford, who has influenced British government policy on food parcels for poor children, is depicted kicking down Prime Minister Boris Johnson's front door in a new mural that appeared on Sunday. The black-and-white mural by an unknown artist was found on a wall covered in graffiti on the bank of a canal near Old Trafford. It depicts Rashford, wearing an England strip, with children standing on either side of him, as if seen from the inside of a doorway. Rashford has his right foot raised and flexed. A replica of the famous black door of Number 10 Downing Street, official residence and workplace of British prime ministers, lies on the ground in front of the mural, creating the illusion that Rashford has just kicked it down.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'No pressure or anxiety this time'

25-year-old striker Suman Reza is likely to be head coach Jamie Day's first-choice striker in the absence of Nabib Newaj Jibon during a tri-nation tournament also involving hosts Nepal and Kyrgyzstan's U-23 team. The Brit has already termed Suman the best local player of the Bangladesh Premier League based on performances. The captain of struggling Uttar Baridhara Club talked to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman about different aspects of his career ahead of the start of the tournament tomorrow in Kathmandu.



The Daily Star (TDS): Will you have any specific targets in Nepal?

Suman Reza (SR): Of course. I have a target goals in Nepal if I am given chances in matches. Apart from individual targets, I am also confident that we will return with a trophy from Nepal.

TDS: You are one of the top two local scorers in the domestic league this season. Will that help you at the international level?

SR: Getting goals in matches requires some luck, but there must be effort on the field. As I have gotten some goals in the league, it will of course help boost confidence in international matches.

TDS: How is your confidence ahead of the tri-nation tournament, especially after representing Bangladesh in just three international matches before?

SR: I was really excited to represent Bangladesh the first time and anxiety played a role and I felt pressure before taking to the field suddenly, despite everyone backing me. But this time around, there is no pressure or anxiety and I believe I can show my own game in international matches.

TDS: You were almost an unknown before being picked for the national team so there was no pressure on you before the start of the league. But are you feeling any pressure ahead of the start of the league this time?

SR: I haven't felt any pressure but I set a target of becoming the top-scorer or the best promising player in the league. With

that in mind, I have already struck six goals. As captain of Uttar Baridhara Club, I always want to win every match and I give more effort up front to get goals so that no one can raise any fingers at my performances.

TDS: Jamie has said time and again that this tournament is a platform to judge new players. How confident are you of securing a place in the national squad for the World Cup Qualifiers?

SR: If Jamie wants to see younger players in the tournament, I think it is good because every player will have a chance to show their talent. After playing three international matches, I grew in confidence and learned more about how to play international matches. I believe I can do better than my first three matches.

TDS: Have you noticed any improvements in your game after getting the national call-up?

SR: I came back to the club with more confidence after playing for the national team and it also inspired me to put up good performances for my club during domestic matches.

TDS: You may receive offers from title aspirants next season. Would you prefer to play regularly in the starting eleven or run the risk of being benched like many other players who moved to bigger clubs after making it to the national team?

SR: If I get an offer from a big club, one thing I want is to ensure is playing time. I will discuss with clubs whether they will rope in two foreign strikers or give me chances in the playing eleven. Still, I am always ready to take the challenge of fighting for my place in the first eleven.

Nothing new, never dull

BISHWAJIT ROY



There is never a dull moment in Bangladesh cricket and one does not always have to wait for

sporadic on-field successes for excitement.

Bangladesh's premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan again proved that as his marathon Facebook conversation on Saturday night with Cricfrenzy, a cricket portal, has caused quite a stir in the country's cricket fraternity. It has comfortable overshadowed the Tamim Iqbal-led side's chastening defeat in their first ODI against New Zealand in Dunedin following an abysmal batting performance.

During his long conversation, Shakib was as shrewd as he always has been on the field, but hardly said anything new regarding the problems in Bangladesh cricket.

But there was an interesting tidbit: according to Shakib, despite the good leadership of

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan and the contributions of former national captain-turned BCB Director Khaled Mahmud, there are so many problems in the country's cricket.

"We have a number of people in the cricket board who have played for Bangladesh, but apart from [Khaled Mahmud] Sujon bhai, they are not too involved. Sujon bhai and [Nazmul Hassan] Papon bhai must be credited for the 2019 Under-19 World Cup win. But I can't find any more people from the board to give credit. I don't think they think much about cricket," was Shakib's take on the functioning of the board.

The ace all-rounder defended his position on many issues such as the criticism regarding his perceived unwillingness to play Test cricket and the reason behind his desire to skip Tests to play the Indian Premier League (IPL). He also slammed the game's governing body for their failures in many areas.

There is more excitement

"It was a long interview, so we will have to go through it first and then discuss about it. However, I did hear that he (Shakib) said I didn't read his letter properly. Since Shakib said that he is willing to play Tests, now we might reconsider his NOC which we gave for playing the IPL."

AKRAM KHAN
BCB CRICKET OPERATIONS CHAIRMAN

Shakib's salvo would not go unanswered. Akram Khan, BCB's cricket operation committee chairman who bore the brunt of Shakib's ire, after a meeting at the BCB boss's residence said yesterday, "Since Shakib has made it clear that he is not unwilling to play Tests, we will reconsider his NOC [no objection certificate] for the IPL."

On the other hand, during this period Tamim will definitely be looking forward to make his words come true and prove they are proud of their batting and are not a team to be shot out for 130 odd

runs when they play the second ODI in Christchurch on Tuesday.

The entire team know well that if they can somehow manage one win from this tour, their mission of rewriting a sordid history in New Zealand will be successful.

In all this off- and on-field discussions, there is hardly any chance the Bangabandhu 22nd National Cricket League (NCL), which gets underway today, will make any headlines until another disaster in Test cricket brings our first-class competitions to the fore.

Are we actually discussing anything new or taking any new steps regarding the poor state of the country's cricket, other than blaming each other following one failure after another?

Players, including Shakib, are right from their perspective; board officials are right in their planning and policy and pundits keep writing the same thing again and again -- this is the same old story of Bangladesh cricket.

Still, there is no dull moment -- even when we keep singing the same old song.

NCL set to start today

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a long gap due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to start regular domestic competitions through the upcoming edition of the country's oldest first-class domestic competition, the Bangabandhu 22nd National Cricket League (BNCL), across four venues from today.

Organisers announced the schedule for the first two rounds through a press release yesterday, scheduling the second round of the BNCL from March 29.

In Tier 1, defending champion Khulna Division will take on Sylhet Division at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna while Dhaka Division to face Rangpur Division at the BKSP-4 ground in Savar.

Rajshahi will lock horns with Chattogram at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi while Barisal Division to host Dhaka Metro in Tier 2.

Selectors announced the squads for the teams and although there were a lot of talk about providing ample opportunities to leg-spinners in first-class competitions, Jubair Hossain was overlooked for Dhaka Division's final squad for the first two rounds.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Beverage brand 7UP yesterday announced the appointment of ace Bangladesh cricketer Shakib Al Hasan as its brand ambassador. The all-rounder will play a pivotal role in delivering 7UP's 'Bhabo Fresh' philosophy to consumers across the country, along with 7UP's witty, wriggly-haired mascot, Fido Dido, said a press release from PepsiCo, Bangladesh.

Archer out of India ODIs

AFP, London



Jofra Archer has been ruled out of England's one-day international series against India and will also miss the start of the Indian Premier League due to an ongoing elbow injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board statement said Sunday.

Fast bowler Archer played in all five matches of the recently concluded Twenty20 series in India, which the hosts won 3-2. He bowled his maximum allocation of 20 overs but was all the while nursing a painful right elbow.

The Sussex quick missed two of the four Tests against India earlier in the tour because of the same elbow problem and is being sent home for further medical assessment.

That means he will miss the three ODI matches in Pune, with his arrival at Rajasthan Royals for the latest IPL delayed. Archer was the Most Valuable Player in the last edition of the IPL.

Mahedi holds batting accountable

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh reached Christchurch on Sunday for the second ODI against hosts New Zealand after losing the opening match of the three-match series in Dunedin.

The visitors travelled four hours by road as a majority of the tourists' contingent wanted to avoid the turbulence on flights, which is common in the island nation.

Bangladesh had travelled to New Zealand with hopes of rewriting history by breaking the jinx of not having won a game against the hosts in their own backyard in 27 attempts.

The Tigers were thumped by eight wickets in the first ODI in Dunedin on Saturday following a disastrous batting performance that led to the visitors folding for 131. Quality seam bowling from Trent Boult and James Neesham also played a part behind the Tigers' helpless surrender.



Off-spinning all-rounder Sheikh Mahedi Hasan, who made his debut in the first ODI, told the media in a virtual press conference that Bangladesh were aiming to stage a comeback in the second ODI, especially in regards to the batting department.

"You need to score runs when playing in

New Zealand. Scores around 260 to 280 are defendable. It is the responsibility of the batting unit to put that score on the board," Mahedi said on Sunday.

Mahedi showed a glimpse of his talent by opening up his account with a six off Mitchell Santner then pulling Trent Boult for a boundary. However, the right-hander departed for just 14 runs and remained wicketless with the ball.

"A player always tries to make a mark on his debut game. I got an ODI debut after playing cricket for so many years, so it is a memorable day for me. But it would have been better if I could have contributed for the team and if the team had won," a frustrated Mahedi added.

Bangladesh will take on New Zealand in Christchurch on Tuesday ahead of the third and final game of in Wellington on March 26. The ODI series will be followed by three T20s to be played on March 28, 30 and April 1 in Hamilton, Napier, and Auckland respectively.



Ansar, BGB win handball titles

SPORTS REPORTER

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Bangladesh Ansar & VDP won the titles of the Walton Independence Day Handball Tournament, which concluded at the M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium in Paltan.

BGB beat Bangladesh Police by 39-25 goals in men's final, with Sagar scoring highest 13 goals for the winning side. In women's section, Bangladesh Ansar & VDP beat Bangladesh Police by 37-25 goals. Alpona of Ansar scored 11 goals for Ansar while Rubina of Police scored the same number of goals for the losing side.

A total of five teams participated in men's section while four teams participated in women's section. The matches were held in league format, with top two teams playing the final.